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POTOMAC FEVER

The Shadrin Mystery: Our Man in Cold Storage?

Have the Russians put U.S. superspy Nick Shadrin in cold storage? That's what the Defense Intelligence Agency doesn't want to say, but his story remains under the shroud of espionage.

Shadrin was the youngest destroyer commander in the Soviet Navy when he and his wife sailed across the Baltic Sea to the West in 1959 and eventually settled near Washington. American intelligence agencies put him through years of interrogation before signing him up for our side. He disappeared under shadowy circumstances in Vienna in 1975.

"After almost eight years," pleaded his wife, Blanka Shadrin, now a McLean, Va., dentist, "I would like to know what happened to Nick. What was done, what happened, if he's alive." That was nine months ago.

A recent DIA letter to her only thickens the mystery. "I find that Nicholas George Shadrin, an employee of the United States, who has been in a missing status since 23 Feb. 1976, is dead," was all DIA director James A. Williams would tell her.

Admiral Arleigh Burke, one of those who debriefed Shadrin in the early 1960s, remembers that "Nick knew his stuff... What he told us helped us tremendously at a time when we knew little about the Soviet navy." Robert Kupperman of the Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies, once a close friend of Nick Shadrin's, says that "people within the intelligence community prevailed upon Nick's really abiding sense of patriotism to this country to take what were extraordinary risks. You've got to remember he was under sentence of death."

The trail of Shadrin's disappearance begins in 1966, when U.S. intelligence recruited a So-



viet embassy employee here who became a "mole" code-named Igor, who made an important request. He said he needed to prove his worth to the KGB by appearing to recruit Nick Shadrin.

According to Henry Hurt, a roving editor for Reader's Digest who wrote a book about Shadrin, "Nick was not told that he was being used as a piece of bait for Igor to take back to the KGB. If he knew, he would never have done the work asked of him." On Dec. 20, 1975, Nick Shadrin said goodbye to his wife and disappeared.

General Sam Wilson, former director of the DIA, describes the Vienna operation as a "bungle, sloppy... There was no counter-intelligence [protection for] his meeting. He was alone, he was unprotected, and the Soviets simply fulfilled one of their basic laws—death to traitors." General Daniel Graham, Sha-

drin's former boss at the DIA, describes the security arrangements for Shadrin in Vienna as a "tragic goof." The FBI and the CIA have remained silent about the disappearance of Nicholas Shadrin. The Soviets claim they don't have him.

Reader's Digest sued under the Freedom of Information Act in an effort to obtain documents that would shed light on the Shadrin disappearance. In April the door was shut. Only blacked-out, superficial papers were released. Hurt said in an interview last week that "what the language of the judge's decision tells me is that there is far more to the Shadrin case than any of us on the outside ever imagined. All of the possibilities are Byzantine and some quite sinister."

The most sinister possibility is that Shadrin was betrayed by the U.S. in Vienna to help build up Igor in the eyes of the KGB, though some intelligence officers feel he may still be alive on a long-term mission. Why else would the government—eight years later—continue to classify the papers in the Shadrin case as top secret?

General Wilson's belief, however, is that Shadrin was betrayed. "I feel that when he agreed to meet his Soviet case officer in Vienna that the clandestine operations tradecraft requisite to such a situation was not exercised. In effect, a man who had already suffered a great deal psychologically was sent out alone on a dark night into the winter streets of Vienna to meet his own executioner."

Mrs. Shadrin had no further comment. She now receives \$7,000 a year, a widow's benefit from the government, for her loss. ■

—Patricia Lynch